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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003368

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR ADVISOR'S MEETING WITH KRG INTELLIGENCE
CHIEF MASROUR BARZANI

REF: BAGHDAD 3157

Classified By: A/DCM Gary A. Grappo for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting on December 21 with the Ambassador's Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq (SANI), the KRG's Director for National Security (intelligence), Masrour Barzani, said the election law compromise agreement was unfair to the Kurds, who had been disproportionately pressured to make concessions. Responding to Barzani's complaint that Kurdish opposition and media had unfairly criticized Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leaders for the agreement, SANI noted that KRG President Barzani had reduced space for compromise by involving hardline Kurdish elements early in the election law negotiations. Looking ahead to elections and government formation, it would be better if Kurds focused on the need for compromise within the broader national context of Iraq, rather than looking only at equities specific to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). Barzani said further progress on merging KDP- and PUK-affiliated assayesh elements was contingent on a draft law currently with the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament for its review. SANI noted that merging the assayesh and making the new entity accountable to the KRG - and not to the KDP or PUK - would help rebut allegations by Arabs and Turkomans in the disputed internal boundary (DIBs) areas of abuses by assayesh, increasing transparency and reducing tension in the DIBs areas. Complaining that KRG intelligence officials cannot trust their counterparts in Iraq's national intelligence service, Barzani did not anticipate that the two services would be become effectively interoperable soon. End summary.

ELECTION LAW MODALITIES "NOT RIGHT"

12. (C) Responding to SANI's opening queries about the compromise (reftel), Barzani flatly said it was unfair, "especially for the Kurds". Decrying the lack of an accurate census and pointing to "ridiculous" claims about increased populations in Mosul, Baghdad, Basra and other predominantly Arab provinces, he said the seat distribution specified in the election law compromise did not reflect demographic reality. He predicted that the predetermined allocation of seats to each of the provinces would negatively affect voter turnout, since there was less to be gained by high turnout in a particular province. Saying the election law compromise had alienated Iraqi voters, he cautioned against "putting democracy in a locked box and playing with it at the level of politicians". The only good thing about the election law compromise was that a law had been passed and an election date established; the law itself was "not right".

KURDS BELIEVE THEY WERE DISPROPORTIONATELY PRESSURED

13. (C) Kurds felt there had been extreme and disproportionate pressure on them to make compromises beyond what was asked of other groups, Barzani said. He complained that the "so-called Kurdish opposition" (i.e., the Goran Movement) attacked KRG leaders for reaching a compromise agreement. Such criticism heightened tension between Kurds who favored participating in the national political process and less responsible voices who called for boycotting it. Politics required discussion, compromise and decision, which was the course pursued by the KRG's leadership on the election law compromise. Barzani stressed that Kurdish leaders agreed to the election law compromise "in part" because of U.S. assurances to the Kurds.

(Note: A reference to the POTUS/VPOTUS calls with KRG President Masoud Barzani and the December 7 White House statement. End note.) Reprising a familiar theme, Barzani claimed only the Kurds were pressured to make concessions on core interests to other groups. Kurds are Iraqis and should have both the duties and rights of other Iraqis. SANI pointed out that the USG had pressed all sides, not just the Kurds, to be flexible and to make necessary compromises to strengthen the electoral process.

KURDISH OPPOSITION MAKES POLITICAL HAY WITH COMPROMISE

14. (C) SANI noted he had been in contact with Kurdish opposition elements during the election law debate and asked them not to adopt positions that would complicate KRG President Masoud Barzani's effort to reach a compromise agreement that was in the interest of all Kurds and Iraqis. Opposition leaders told SANI they would support KRG President Barzani in any agreement he chose to reach. If they had

since criticized the election law compromise, they had not stood by that commitment.

15. (C) Barzani agreed, noting that KRG President Barzani referred the election law compromise proposal to the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament (IKP) and Kurdish Alliance List (KAL) bloc in the Council of Representatives (national parliament) to ensure their buy-in. That thinking also informed the decision to include Goran members in the IKP delegation sent to Baghdad to help KAL leaders negotiate the final deal. Claiming none of those actors objected to the decision on an election law before the vote, Barzani said "irresponsible" Goran members and others had since questioned the "naivete" of KRG leaders and the credibility of the commitments between the U.S. and KRG. Barzani complained that IKR press employed "shallow language" and an unprofessional approach in criticizing the deal. (Comment: As noted reftel, members of the KAL and IKP delegation were still debating the deal when Kurdish parliamentary leaders declared they had accepted it and a vote was called. Barzani was likely upset with Kurdish press coverage in part because it highlighted that KRG President Barzani effectively decided to impose a decision to accept the deal over objections by members of the IKP delegation. End comment.)

16. (C) Noting that KRG President Barzani had been savvy in navigating through Kurdish political forces, SANI speculated that involving the hardline IKP early in the election law negotiations had locked in positions instead of leaving space for compromise. Looking ahead to elections and government formation, it would be better if KRG President Barzani used his influence to prepare Kurds for compromise within the broader national context of Iraq, rather than focusing only on the context of the IKR. The best way to preserve what the IKR had accomplished to date was through constructive engagement within the national Iraqi political system.

KIRKUK - DEMOCRACY MUST BE APPLIED EVENLY

17. (C) On Kirkuk, Barzani said believing in democracy meant the democratic process had to be protected whether or not it served a particular constituency's interests. The KRG

supported the Iraqi constitution, which prescribed solutions for various problems, including disputed areas. Turkomans and Arabs, he claimed, well understand that a constitutional approach to resolving the issue of Kirkuk would disadvantage them, and therefore opposed it. (Comment: KRG leaders' interpretation of a "constitutional approach" involves a census followed by an "up or down" referendum; the U.S. and UNAMI privately endorse a referendum to confirm a negotiated, consensus agreement on Kirkuk's status. Sunni Arab politicians tend to argue that Article 140 is void altogether because its built-in timeline has expired. End comment.) Referring to Iran's recent occupation of an oil rig on Iraqi soil in Maysan province, Barzani sharply criticized the Shi'a-led GOI for not strongly opposing the incursion, and questioned its leaders' national loyalties.

MERGER OF KDP AND PUK SECURITY FORCES

¶8. (C) Barzani said the merger of KDP- and PUK-aligned peshmerga elements was moving forward. On the proposed parallel merger of KDP- and PUK-aligned assayesh elements, he said that after a year of meetings, each side developed separate draft plans for effecting the merger. To integrate those plans into a cohesive plan of action, new legislation is required to detail the responsibilities and duties of the merged organization. A law has been forwarded to the IKP; next steps on merging the assayesh - merging the two organizations' leadership structures will likely be among the first - are contingent on passage of the law. Noting the timeline for the drawdown of U.S. forces, SANI stressed that it would be better for the KRG to move quickly to merge the assayesh to capitalize on the current level of U.S. forces. Barzani agreed that it would be good to maximize training and assistance opportunities; however, he offered that combining the assayesh elements would not substantially impact their daily operations - the assayesh had done an excellent job of keeping the IKR safe.

ASSAYESH MERGER COULD HELP MITIGATE ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

¶9. (C) SANI noted that, while allegations by Sunni Arabs and Turkomans in the DIBs of abuses by assayesh were often not credible, the fact that the assayesh were not visible lent

the claims plausibility. The ability to say the merged assayesh was accountable to the KRG - and not to the KDP or PUK - would help rebut such charges. Barzani dismissed charges of assayesh abuses in the DIBs as "hugely exaggerated" and urged those with grievances to form an investigative committee and present their findings to the KRG. "We want to fix these issues if they are true", he said. Claiming Kurds suffered similar depredations at the hands of other groups in places like Sinjar, Makhmour and Diyala, Barzani claimed that they did not complain as much as Arabs and Turkomans. SANI noted that merging the assayesh would help increase contact, coordination and transparency between the assayesh and Iraqi Security Forces, lowering tension and building trust. The Northern Security Architecture would contribute to security in the DIBs areas; analogous cooperation on intelligence would greatly help.

INTEGRATION OF INTELLIGENCE SERVICES NOT LIKELY SOON

¶10. (C) Barzani did not anticipate that KRG intelligence services would be integrated or achieve effective interoperability with the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) soon. While KRG intelligence officials work with their INIS counterparts "as much as we can", Barzani flatly said the Kurds do not trust them. The Kurds need a partner who can support and help them, but the INIS regularly betrays their Kurdish partners, contacts and sources. (Note: As an example, he said a recently-appointed head of the INIS in Mosul with ties to terrorist networks responsible for smuggling VBIEDs had been arrested and confessed. End note.)

Lamenting the GOI's lack of intelligence and counter-terrorist capability, Barzani said that while the KRG had no intention of keeping forces in areas outside the IKR (i.e., in the DIBs areas) permanently, it would do so as long as they were needed. The KRG wanted to help, but there was no dealing with "irreconcilables" like the (Sunni) al-Hadba Gathering in Ninewa, whom he derided as unreconstructed Ba'athists.

¶11. (C) Noting that current cooperation between U.S. forces and assayesh was strong, SANI stressed that the status quo would not endure. Both sides had to look to the future and there needed to be better assayesh-INIS cooperation. Al-Hadba was an interesting political phenomenon. As Sunni Arabs, who represented a significant constituency in Iraq, moved forward from a troubled past under Saddam and during the insurgency, they needed to be responsible and respectful of their neighbors in northern Iraq. For its part, the USG would continue working to foster constructive political interaction between Kurds and Sunni Arabs, both in Ninewa (home of al-Hadba) and across the DIBs region.
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